

**CHEVY CHASE VILLAGE
BOARD OF MANAGERS
OCTOBER 8, 2012 MEETING**

STAFF REPORT

TO: BOARD OF MANAGERS
FROM: SHANA R. DAVIS-COOK, VILLAGE MANAGER 
DATE: 10/3/2012
SUBJECT: UPDATE ON THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA'S EFFORTS TO
SIGNALIZE CHEVY CHASE CIRCLE

On Monday, October 1, Board Chair Pat Baptiste, Director of Municipal Operations Michael Younes and I represented the Village at a meeting in our Village Hall with officials from the District's Department of Transportation, National Park Service, Maryland State Highway Administration, Maryland District 18 State Senator Richard Madaleno's office, County Council President Roger Berliner's office, DC Council member Mary Cheh's office, and County Council Chief of Staff Glenn Orlin. The meeting was called by Maryland's 8th District Congressman Chris Van Hollen's office and was hosted by Karen McManus from the congressman's Office of Outreach & Constituent Services.

Key Points from the Meeting of Local Officials

The primary objective of this meeting was to get the officials from all of the directly abutting jurisdictions together to understand the District's proposal to signalize the eastbound and westbound Western Avenue approaches to Chevy Chase Circle. Below are key points from the meeting:

- The National Park Service (NPS) representatives explained that the entire interior circle (inside the curb) is owned and controlled by NPS. NPS views the Circle as an important historic resource the aesthetic, mature trees, and landscaping of which should be preserved to whatever extent possible. The Circle is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.
- Representatives from the District's Department of Transportation (DDOT) explained that the proposed plans to signalize the Circle were based on their citizens' feedback from the Rock Creek West II Livability Study (RCWLS) conducted in February 2011, in which 62 residents expressed concerns with the use of the Circle, representing the second highest number of comments regarding an intersection in the study area. Comments primarily referenced how confusing the Circle was to navigate and the prevalence of aggressive driving.
- In follow-up to the RCWLS, DDOT performed traffic and pedestrian counts for the Western Avenue intersections with the Circle. Although both intersections met the minimum vehicle-count requirements warranting a signal, neither intersection met the minimum threshold for the number of pedestrians.

- DDOT insisted that the only method to ensure safe pedestrian access around the outer edge of the circle or to access the interior circle is to provide a break in traffic flow, namely a controlled signal.
- Representatives from the Maryland State Highway Administration and the offices of the County and State elected officials urged that any evaluation of whether a signal is needed should include a multi-jurisdictional study to determine the impacts the proposed signals would have on a wider area beyond the roadway around the Circle and the District's abutting residential streets.
- Ms. Baptiste spoke directly to the concerns expressed by residents of the Village and other neighboring municipalities: that signals on Chevy Chase Circle will back-up traffic along Connecticut Avenue and force drivers, specifically commuters, to cut-through the residential streets in the neighboring communities. Coupled with the traffic impacts from BRAC and future development in the Chevy Chase Lake area, it is safe to assume that signalization of the Circle will make vehicular access to Connecticut Avenue and its intersecting streets extremely difficult.
- DDOT would not commit to spend any funds performing a multi-jurisdictional traffic impact study until NPS officials were willing to indicate whether they would permit the installation of the signals within the center circle. NPS officials stated that they would be unable to provide any indication until DDOT presented additional information that would represent the potential impacts (aesthetic and physical) on the interior circle.
- As we learned during the meeting, the State Highway Administration does not currently have any comprehensive studies of vehicular or pedestrian traffic along Connecticut Avenue. Following the meeting Ms. Baptiste spoke to Senator Madaleno's staffer Mr. John Olderman who agreed to ask Senator Madaleno to formally request that SHA perform a full study of Connecticut Avenue, the scope of which is likely to include the span between East West Highway and Chevy Chase Circle (studies of Connecticut Avenue farther north are available from the recent BRAC process in Bethesda).

Interim Resolution

At the conclusion of the meeting DDOT agreed to spend minimal dollars assessing:

1) exactly where the proposed signals would need to be installed, 2) what if any trees would need to be removed or pruned to allow for installation and maintenance of the proposed signals, and 3) to provide elevations to represent the impact on sightlines into the interior circle from the surrounding properties. DDOT did not provide an estimate for when this information would be provided to NPS.

Upon receipt of this information, NPS will indicate whether they are likely to entertain installation of the proposed signals. If NPS provides preliminary support, DDOT will coordinate with the neighboring jurisdictions to perform a multi-jurisdictional traffic impact study, the results of which will be submitted to NPS as a formal request for approval.

National Park Service Review Process

After the meeting concluded, I attempted to get a better understanding of the NPS process to approve a major infrastructure change in an existing park located on the National Register of Historic Places. The NPS officials advised that any proposed signalization in the circle would be subject to a lengthy review process including separate reviews by the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. The former is a body created by Congress to provide expert advice to the heads of departments and agencies of the Federal and District of Columbia governments on matters of design and aesthetics, as they affect the Federal interest and preserve the dignity of the nation's capital. The latter is an independent federal agency that provides a forum for influencing federal activities, programs and policies that affect historic properties. The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation's process, referred to as the "Section 106 Review", includes a review of public safety concerns and public comment.

Bottom Line

DDOT officials heard loud and clear that they must continue to work with the neighboring jurisdictions—including Chevy Chase Village—on any proposed signalization of Chevy Chase Circle. We also used the meeting as an opportunity to extend an invitation for a partnership on other issues of mutual interest.

Any potential signals will not be installed any time soon. There is lengthy work ahead for the District and an extensive review process to obtain National Park Service approval.

We will continue to monitor any future developments.

